

MEETING REPORT

**West Africa Businesswomen's Network
(WABNET) Executive Board Meeting**
Support to the Sahel and West Africa Regional Programs Project



SUBMITTED TO
USAID, West Africa Regional
Program

IN RESPONSE TO
PCE-I-09-98-00016-00

SUBMITTED BY
Nathan Associates Inc.
Arlington, Virginia

February, 2002

MEETING REPORT

**West Africa Businesswomen's Network
(WABNET) Executive Board Meeting**
Support to the Sahel and West Africa Regional Programs Project

SUBMITTED TO
USAID, West Africa Regional
Program

IN RESPONSE TO
PCE-I-09-98-00016-00

SUBMITTED BY
Nathan Associates Inc.
Arlington, Virginia

February, 2002

WABNET Executive Board Meeting

BACKGROUND

The USAID West Africa Regional Program (USAID/WARP) financed a conference for West African businesswomen co-sponsored by the West African Women's Association from the 29th of July to August 2nd, 2001 in Bamako, Mali. Two institutional development specialists organized the 54 women from 13 ECOWAS countries who gathered at the Dafina Hotel for the week-long conference. The main purpose of this conference was to bring together women from the region to discuss common issues and concerns they face in doing business regionally and globally. The most significant outcome of this workshop was the creation of the non-governmental organization, West African Businesswomen Network (WABNET) or Réseau de l'Entrepreneuriat Féminin en Afrique de l'Ouest (REFAO). Participants elected a provisional Board with the following composition (President, Vice President, Anglophone Secretary, Francophone Secretary, Anglophone Treasurer, and Francophone Treasurer). They agreed that members must be West African women owners and operators of registered businesses and fixed dues at \$50 per entrepreneur. They also agreed to admit institutional members, such as women's business and professional organizations, with institutional dues of \$500 per association. Thirty-seven participants paid the dues and became founding members of the network. The provisional officers developed a detailed Plan of Operations for the first year, which was adopted by the whole body. Delegates from each country received a video cassette of the opening and closing ceremonies for transmission in their home country where they planned to organize a national cell, meet with donors, recruit members, develop and monitor a budget.

In order to assist WABNET with program development, Nathan-MSI again engaged the two institutional development specialists to perform the following:

- Establishment of WABNET Statutes and assistance with program planning;
- Establishment of a WABNET communication plan; and,
- Organization and facilitation of the WABNET executive committee meeting.

In November 2001, they met with WABNET's president to draft statutes for the women's network, using as a model those of the West African Enterprise Network. They then planned the Executive Board meeting for January, to bring together elected Board members and delegates from countries not represented on the board.

WABNET EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING, COTONOU, BENIN, 21-25 JANUARY, 2002

Institutional Development Specialists Lucie Phillips and Nadine Duplessy Kearns organized WABNET Executive Board Meeting for the week of January 21st 2002 at the Benin Marina Hotel in Cotonou. Five out of six provisional Board Members attended the meeting representing Niger, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Togo, and Senegal. Additionally, delegates from

national WABNET chapters attended from Mali, Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea and Ghana. The agenda included the following (see attached for complete agenda):

- Report on country chapters (Membership and type, chapter financial report);
- Presentation and discussion on West Africa Enterprise Network (WAEN) and West African Women's Association (WAWA) charters – lessons for WABNET;
- Discussion on proposed WABNET charter – modifications and adoption of charter;
- Discussion on proposed WABNET by-laws;
- Discussion on WABNET Action Plan;
- Budgeting and financing of Action Plan;
- Financing and logistics of WABNET General Assembly; and,
- Email training.

KEY OUTCOMES OF EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING

Country Chapter Reports and Email Training

Participants presented a report on WABNET in their home country. To strengthen internal communications in the network, participants wrote up and e-mailed their reports to everyone. Some received first time training on using e-mail and assistance with opening and using their email account.

WABNET Charter

After brief discussions on WAEN and WAWA charters as starting points for WABNET, the president introduced a proposed charter for the network. Participants modified the charter to reflect their needs and ideas. They retained individual membership dues at \$50 and women's association at \$500. Institutional members are to have 10 votes in country chapter decisions. They decided that each country would make an equal contribution to the regional WABNet, in contrast to the original plan whereby WABNet would have a proportion of all dues. That contribution is currently set at \$500, which will give the regional organization a budget of about \$6500 if most countries pay. Only those countries that have paid dues by June are eligible to vote in the October General Assembly. Each country chapter that has paid on time receives three votes in the organization.

On the last day of the meeting, nine of the 10 countries (Mali representative was absent) present adopted the final version of the charter.

WABNET By-Laws

Using the by-laws of REFCEN (Réseau de Femmes Chef d'Entreprises du Niger) as a model, with a couple of alternative models available, participants developed WABNET by-laws to guide the operations of the Regional network and country chapters.

WABNET Action Plan

Participants reviewed the action plan developed at last July's conference in Bamako. They agreed to hold the General Assembly in Accra, Ghana, in October 2002. They adopted a budget of \$7400 for this year and authorized the President and Treasurers to incur expenditures from personal funds, pending reimbursement from the Treasury.

Participants agreed to prepare country reports on micro finance and tax problems and email the reports to members. Each participant reported extemporaneously on the status of micro finance in her country, and the needs for business credit. In several countries (Sierra Leone, Liberia, Niger) there is mainly a need to develop micro finance further. In other countries, there seemed to be well developed micro finance, but a pressing need for intermediate credit (\$5,000-\$100,000, 1-5 year). Development of a website continues to be a priority. It is important to recruit members and provide information to West African Businesswomen. Paid-up members will be named on the website, together with their firms. The capability for tendering via email will be developed as women become more experienced using email. The women agreed to do more substantive investigation into the situation of micro finance and also on business taxes (especially VAT) impact, and to report to one another via email. This is in lieu of their original plan to commission studies on those two issues, as it is clear that organizational issues such as recruiting and registering their country chapters are going to impede implementation of the substantive program until the General Assembly is held. They also decided to seek an alliance with WAEN to lobby on issues of mutual concern.

WABNET General Assembly

For the October 2002 General Assembly in Ghana, Mrs. Akyea-Djamson will take the lead in making the preparations. The five-day agenda is to include an exhibition of goods and services from women's businesses in the region. Because last July's exhibition at the Bamako meeting resulted in a flood of orders for at least one Sierra Leonian woman, all were keen to make the exhibition/sales an important part of the General Assembly at every gathering. Participants agreed to seek sponsorship and funding to offset the costs of the meeting. Attendees will pay admissions fees and will cover their own travel and lodging expenses.

WABNET Treasury

At last July's meeting, elected WABNET Treasurers collected dues from participants who became founding members of the network. They could not place the sum in a bank as WABNET was not yet a registered organization, so USAID temporarily kept custody. As USAID asked to be relieved of that responsibility, the funds were transferred to the Francophone Treasurer, who will establish a blocked account in Dakar and hold the funds until the network is legally registered and an organizational account is opened.

The Anglophone and Francophone secretaries will circulate minutes of the meeting by email. Translation was provided by volunteers during the meeting, and participants came away with a renewed commitment to becoming bilingual.

Next Steps

WABNET Board members and country chapter representatives agreed to use the adopted charter and by-laws to officially register their country chapters. The membership will meet in Accra in October 2002, when they will vote on adoption of the charter and by-laws and hold elections for a permanent Executive Committee.

The meeting in Cotonou helped strengthen the network's resolve to become a regional organization that can lobby for women's issues in their countries and across ECOWAS. The General Assembly will be crucial to determining the course of the network as will the establishment of a WABNET website. Participants recognized the need for more donor funds to help them achieve their objectives.

NAME	EMAIL	ADDRESS	TEL/FAX
Madeleine GBEDO	hotelgl@leland.bj	MAG P.O. Box 4170 Cotonou, BENIN	229 304086 229 941736
Danielle DELOCHE	ddeloche@hotmail.com	RELAX HOTEL, Avenue de la Nation, Ouagadougou BURKINA FASO	226 23 92 85
Esinam AKYEA-DJAMSON	esinama@yahoo.com arcintegra@ghana.com	Arc Integra P.O. Box CT 1843 Cantonments Accra, GHANA	233 21 779955 233 21 779955
Aissatou BALDE	aissatoubalde2002@yahoo.fr	FEPADOR P.O. Box 6489 GUINEA	224 13 404238 224 413620
Kadiatou Souko TRAORE	kadisoukotraor@yahoo.fr	C.M.D.E. R 133 P. 226 Bamako, MALI	223 228933
Amina HASSANE	wangari@intnet.ne	Complexe Technique Wangari P.O. Box 11231 Niamey, NIGER	227 742985 227 743374
Ronke ONADEKO	cool@nova.net.ng	Delt-R Nigeria LTD 38 Sura Mogaji Street, Ompeju Estate Lagos, NIGERIA	234 1 4963856 234 1 4963856
Fatou Gueye	ndiakhategueye@hotmail.com	Centre Artisanal Elisabeth Diouf P.O. Box 993 Mbour, SENEGAL	221 9571377 221 9572006
Margarette COLE	maggshaff@yahoo.com	Piccadilly Restaurant 111 Campbell Street Freetown, SIERRA LEONE	232 22 241271
Dede TRENOU	trenou_dede@yahoo.fr	ETS Doe Bruce P.O. Box 1097 Lome, TOGO	228 221261 228 214559
Dunstanette MACAULEY	dmacau@hotmail.com Dun.macauley@togo- imet.com	TOGO	228 22 28484
Yamilee BASTIEN	ybastien@usaid.gov yamileebastien@yahoo.com	USAID	202 712 0733
Nadine DUPLESSY KEARNS	ndkearns@ibi-usa.com	IBI 2200 Clarendon Blvd, 1204 Arlington, VA USA	703 525 2277 703 525 2211

Lucie PHILLIPS	lcphillips@ibi-usa.com	IBI 2200 Clarendon Blvd, 1204 Arlington, VA USA	703 525 2277 703 525 2211
Jean HARMAN	jharman@usaid.gov ellenjeanharman@hotmail.com	USAID/Mali	223 23 33 31 202 478 5142